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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



FALL 1992

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE...TRANSFORMATIONS

The question of small farms, versus large integrated ones, is timely and particularly relevant to the United States and most countries of Europe. This is a time of transformation for both continents. Major events at home and in Europe e.g. vacillating values of currency, turbulence in Eastern Europe, outcome of the Uruguay Round, etc. all will have a very important bearing on the future of farm policy in the United States.

A decade ago, some people felt that America's small farms were obsolete, in the sense that their owners' failure to enlarge them made them targets for those seeking agricultural land. Many farmers sold their farms, and took up other vocations. It was a period of transition but the movement continues even now and will on into the future. Few agricultural economists foresaw how quickly or how drastically the agricultural bull market of the 1970's would change in the decade of the 80's. Today small farmers (many of whom are part-time operators) and their farms, rather than obsolete, appear only different -- but this time in a very positive sense. They are perhaps the greatest strategic resource reserve of this country when evaluating the country's future security. Realistically, they are a tremendous "hidden asset."

In the remaining years of this century, American agriculture will face major challenges. The agricultural community will find new ways of conducting business. Those having a stake in the future of American agriculture are consumers, farmers, and policymakers.

Farm numbers have declined in most regions of the world. However, unfavorable economic conditions in the non-farm sector may encourage some people not currently engaged in agriculture, to embrace the vocation whether full or part-time as a business. Still, others may use agriculture for the life style it provides or as a hobby. In either instance, the land or countryside is being maintained and flora and fauna preserved.

American agriculture is super efficient and the envy of many people who live and farm in other areas of the world. However, over the years the number of people engaged in agriculture has declined along with increasing dollars paid for machinery that

will lower labor costs. Without citing statistical data, it is suffice it to say that during my 40 years of exposure to the agricultural industry I have observed vast changes in almost every aspect of the industry. The number of U.S. farms has been reduced 50 percent, from 4 million to 2 million; part-time farming is now extensively practiced and alternative and diversified agriculture is in vogue.

I want to voice the strongest support for small farms or those people who indulge in small-scale agriculture; they are the foundation stock from which large farming operations may emerge. Everywhere in the world the existence of small farms is important. Akin to seeds, they become the viable hope for all generations to come.

Small farms should be considered a permanent part of 21st century farm structure and policymakers looking to the future must design bi-modal programs to facilitate and perpetuate this particular segment of the agricultural industry. It is becoming increasingly clear that future farm policy should not be guided entirely by economics.

(Howard W. (Bud) Kerr, Jr., Director, USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture (OSSA), excerpted from "The Future Structure of Agriculture" an invited paper presented at the 7th World Congress of Agricultural Journalists, Indianapolis, Indiana, October 5, 1992. A copy of the paper may be obtained by writing to the OSSA.)

IMPORTANT

Topic, technologies and calendar of events (yours) are very important to the Office for Small-Scale Agriculture (OSSA). Keep them coming!

Please note our new address: H.W. Kerr, Jr., USDA-CSRS, OSSA, Suite 328-A Aerospace Center, Washington, DC 20250-2200; new telephone 202-401-1805, and new Fax 202-401-1804.

(Mention of commercial enterprises or brand names does not constitute endorsement or imply preference by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.)

TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

More About Corn - Write for a free copy of "Sweet Corn: Wholesale Market Considerations." Contact: Dan Cooper, Agricultural Diversification, Wallace Building, Des Moines, IA 50319; telephone 515-281-5402.

Ball Redbook - This 800-page 15th edition costs \$60 and features the most current research on ornamental crops. It offers practical advice on everything from germination and propagation to pest and disease control. Contact: Kate Barouski, The Grower Talks Bookshelf, P.O. Box 532, Geneva, IL 60134-0532; telephone 708-208-9080.

December 1, 1992, Deadline - The Agroecology Program, University of California Extension offers a 6-month residential Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture, April 5 - October 1, 1993, at the Farm and Garden, U.C. Santa Cruz. For further information, contact: Apprenticeship, Box A, Agroecology Program, University of California, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, CA 95604; telephone 408-459-2321.

Reminder - BE AWARE: a few "shadetree" firewood salespeople try to cut corners on their cord wood sales. A cord measures 4-by-4-by-8 feet neatly stacked.

And - "Minor frustrations wear well when one is outside in 'the fresh air' lost in thoughts of farming and other things. Farming is fun..George Ing." (Good Fruit Grower, June 1991, p. 17)

Movin-On-Up - "North Carolina farmers have been moving into the hog-raising business with a vengeance. Their 1991 production jumped 26.7 percent from 1990 levels, to 3.55 million hogs, according to the North Carolina Agriculture Department." (The Journal of Commerce, July 1, 1992, p. 6A)

Important - The offer for sale of endangered species or wildlife is contingent upon the conditions set forth in the Endangered Species Act and the acquisition of proper permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and State and local agencies. Any questions regarding transactions should be addressed to the Federal Wildlife Permit Office, 1000 N. Glebe Rd., Rm. 611, Arlington, VA 22201, 703-358-1732. Furthermore, all buyers and sellers must have proper licenses and permits.

Updated and Revised - "Successful Small-Scale Farming: An Organic Approach" explains organic farming methods, machinery, best and most profitable crops, and provides helpful charts and tables. This book costs \$13 (paperback). Contact: Storey Communications, P.O. Box 445, Pownal, VT 05261; telephone 1-800-827-8673.

Brazil - "From less than 1 million metric tons in 1975, Brazil's soybean crop grew to almost 19 million this year. Meantime yields this year rose to an estimated 28.25 bushels an acre from 19.33 in 1975." (The Journal of Commerce, June 12, 1992, p. 7A)

Question - Gram for gram, which fruit produces the most iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, vitamin C, and riboflavin? (a) oranges, (b) apple, (c) kiwifruit. Answer is somewhere in this newsletter.

Grasslands Tour - Two weeks in New Zealand in February 1993. Tour participants will observe a range of livestock being farmed on grass pastures, including beef and dairy cattle, sheep, deer, goats, and horses. Contact: Harvest Travel Service, 5801 Christie Ave., Emeryville, CA 94608; telephone 800-227-6464.

Flowers - Everything you need to know to start a cut-flower business is found in the book "Flowers For Sale." At nearly 200 pages, the book costs \$14.95. Contact: Lee Sturdivant, San Juan Naturals, P.O. Box 642, Friday Harbor, WA 98250; telephone 206-378-2648.

New - The 1992 National Directory of Organic Wholesalers is now available for \$34.95. Contact: Mary Speck, California Action Network, P.O. Box 464, Davis, CA 95617; telephone 916-756-8518.

Grazinglands - Russian wild rye may be the newest entry on the cool-season forage menu. In 2 years of field studies, this grass offered grazing 6 months a year, and it was ready for cattle again within a month of being nibbled right down to the ground. Contact: Daniel P. Mowrey, USDA-ARS, Grazinglands Research, P.O. Box 1199, El Reno, OK 73036; telephone 405-262-5291.

Annuals for Fillers - In the flower borders, annuals can be set in among the perennials for late bloom. Consider the size of the annual, however.

Free - The University of California's 1992 "Farm and Garden" publication catalog is now available. Contact: ANR Publications Dept., NR, University of California, Oakland, CA 94608-1239; telephone 510-643-2431, Fax 510-643-5470.

Natural - Dead Kentucky bluegrass could be the key to more natural, environmentally friendly herbicides. That's because the killed grass exudes natural compounds that can hinder other plant growth. Researchers say these compounds kill dandelions and other broadleaf weeds, and might be reproduced artificially for weed control. Contact: Roger D. Hagin, USDA-ARS, Plant Protection Research, 624 Bradfield Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853; telephone 607-255-1712, Fax 607-255-2644.

Farm Business Records - Newly revised, this loose-leaf account book will meet the needs of farmers who want to keep detailed records of their business activities. The cost is \$13, check payable to Cornell University. Contact: Penny Evans, Cornell University Resource Center, 7 Cornell Business and Technology Park, Ithaca, NY 14850; telephone 607-255-7660.

Answer - (c) Kiwifruit.

Herbal Resource Guide - The new 176-page, 1992 edition of the Herbal Green Pages has more than 3,000 listings and is an excellent networking resource. For more information contact: Maureen Rogers, HGMN, P.O. Box 245, Silver Spring, PA 17575-0245; telephone 717-898-3017.

Economic Ties - Robert L. Walker, Maryland Secretary of Agriculture, heads a task force for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture that is examining possible U.S. efforts to assist people in the emerging democracies in Eastern Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union. Contact: Harold K. Kanarek, Office of Public Information, Maryland Department of Agriculture, 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401; telephone 410-841-5882, Fax 410-841-5914.

Sorghum - "Sweet Sorghum Culture and Syrup Production," a new publication about sorghum production and new technologies of syrup processing, is available. Contact: Paul L. Mask, Extension Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849-5633; telephone 205-844-5490.

Prolong the Blooms - Cut flower heads the moment they've passed their prime. Let no plant go to seed except for making seeds you can't get otherwise. And don't let plants suffer for want of water, for this will shorten their bloom.

Tip - Store seeds left over from the planting season dark, dry, and in cool temperatures that fluctuate little.

Herb Growers - Great Northern Botanical Association Inc. is a regional herb growers association for the Northern Rockies and Northern Great Plains. For information about the service and publications send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: GNBA, P.O. Box 362, Helena, MT 59624.

Chicken Cookery - A soft-cover recipe booklet featuring the 24 recipes chosen as finalists in the 1992 Delmarva Cooking Contest. To obtain a copy, send a \$2 check or money order. Contact: Connie Parvis, Delmarva Poultry, RD 2, Box 47, Georgetown, DE 19947-9622; telephone 302-856-9037.

Reservoir of Experts - Need an expert on anaerobic treatment, chaparral watersheds, or water resources economics? Request a copy of the "Directory of Water Resources Expertise in California." Single copies are free. Contact: California Water Resources Center, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521; telephone 714-787-4327.

Pear Fact - "An English schoolmaster named Stair discovered a wild pear and named it Stair's pear, after himself. The fruit was carried to America in the late 18th century and planted in the colony territory of Massachusetts. When land passed to a man named Enoch Bartlett in 1817, he, unaware of the pear's name, called it Bartlett." (California Tree Fruit Agreement)

Observation - Blackberries and raspberries are gaining in popularity in the marketplace. Most costly part of the production is labor (picking cost) and marketing (handling),

because berries are so delicate. If you can meet these challenges, then these crops offer future opportunity for you.

Think About It - "A farm animal circus act is an interesting commentary on the public perception of livestock. Cows and pigs are nearly as unusual as elephants and llamas to the general public---Don Bixby, Executive Director, American Minor Breeds Conservancy." (AMBC News, July-August 1992, p. 12)

Whether - "Depending on the weather and weed challenges, I will move toward the organic end of scale one year and toward the chemical end another year. There is NO one perfect farming method! We try to pick and choose the best of the organic and chemical world..." Clark Moore (A Directory of Farmers' Innovations in Ohio, June 1991, p. 22)

QUESTION & ANSWER

"Can small farmers in California achieve greater profits through promotion of "locally grown" produce? Interviews and sales data indicate that consumers are attracted to locally grown produce, but not if the quality is poor or the price is more than they are used to spending. When markets advertise high-quality, locally grown produce at a fair price, produce sales increase." (California Agriculture, July-August 1992, p. 13)

GOALS, VALUES, & ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

"Most farmers I know don't follow the industrial model that holds maximum profits as a primary goal. When setting goals for their family and farm most farmers put other values in front of maximizing profit. This does not mean that profit is ignored, it is simply in a balanced perspective along with other goals.

"There is a basic conflict inherent in most analysis and evaluation of sustainable vs. conventional farming practices. That conflict is contained in what criteria should be used to measure success. Economists reduce everything to dollars. Although there are now Resource Economist who put a dollar value on natural resources that may be degraded by farming practices, it is still difficult to place a value on a natural lifestyle, stewardship ethics, wildlife habitat, or other farm family goals that cannot be measured by dollars.

This does not mean that we cannot include non-monetary goals in the analysis, it simply means that they must be accounted for in other ways. For example, it is common for farmers to decide to eliminate the use of certain chemicals because of concern over negative health consequences or environmental concerns. In the final analysis, we must each identify our own goals--rather than those of economists--and make our choices accordingly." (Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society Newsletter, Summer 1990, p.6)

Please Circulate

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 16-17, 1992 - Fall Vegetable Field Day, Mississippi State University Truck Crops Branch Experiment Station, Crystal Springs, Mississippi. Contact: Richard G. Snyder, MS University, P.O. Box 231, Crystal Springs, MS 39059; telephone 601-892-3731, Fax 601-892-2056.

November 5-8, 1992 - National Conference, Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, Inc., Sheraton Burlington Hotel and Conference Center, Burlington, Vermont. Contact: Judy Laushman, ASCFG, 155 Elm St., Oberlin, OH 44704; telephone 216-774-2887, Fax 216-774-2435.

November 6-7, 1992 - 9th Annual Hydroponic Grower's Conference, Delta Orlando Resort, Orlando, Florida. Contact: Jim Brown, Cropping, Inc., Medina, OH 44258; telephone 216-725-5656, Fax 216-722-3958.

November 6-7, 1992 - National Conference on Direct and Niche Marketing of Lamb and Wool, Turf Valley Hotel, Ellicott City, Maryland. Contact: Shirley Baber, Department of Agriculture Economics, Virginia Tech., Blacksburg, VA 24061; telephone 703-231-6301.

November 17-19, 1992 - National Conference on Milking Center Design, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Contact: Paula Solat, Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701; telephone 607-255-7654.

December 3-5, 1992 - 1992 North American Grazing Conference, Coliseum Ramada Inn, Jackson, Mississippi. Contact: Jay Hughes, Stockman Grass Farmer, P.O. Box 9607, Jackson, MS 39286; telephone 1-800-748-9808, Fax 601-981-8558.

January 7, 1993 - Marketplace 93, Civic Center Arena and Exhibit Hall, Bismarck, North Dakota. Contact: Mylo Candee, Room 228 Federal Building, 220 East Rosser Avenue, Bismarck, ND 58501; telephone 201-258-4648.

January 14-17, 1993 - North American Bramble Growers Association, Ontario Berry Growers Association and International Ribes Association joint annual conference at Sheraton Fallsview, Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. Contact: Paul Otten, 2124 University Ave., St. Paul, MN 55114-1838; telephone 612-659-2515, Fax 612-659-2464.

January 26-February 2, 1993 - The 8th Annual National Farm Direct Marketing Conference, Red Lion Inn, Lloyd Center, Portland, Oregon. Contact: Cathi McLain, Pacific Northwest Farm Direct Market Association, c/o Oregon Department of Agriculture, 121 SW Salmon, Suite 240, Portland, OR 97240-2987; telephone 503-229-6734.

February 9-12, 1993 - World Deer Congress 1993, Christchurch, New Zealand. Contact: Henry Studholme, NZP Box 2678, Wellington, New Zealand; telephone (Int 64) 4 472-5092, Fax (Int 64) 4 472-5151.

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